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M'LUHAN'S VISION UNSETTLES P.E.N.

Canadian Urges Writers 'to
Go to Control Tower'

By HARRY GILROY

Marshall McLuhan yesterday expounded at the International P.E.N. Congress on the alterations wrought in the writer's environment by the development of "electrical circuitry." The reaction of his audience of writers was generally both skeptical and scared.

Mr. McLuhan, the Canadian author and university professor, was the chairman of a panel discussion at the Loeb Student Center of New York University. It was the second day of sessions of the week-long P.E.N. (Poets, Playwrights, Essayists and Novelists).

Some of the 300 writers from around the world who heard Mr. McLuhan showed that they had read his book "Understanding Media: The Extension of Man." A program note pointed out that Mr. McLuhan argues in the book that "electrical technology has both narrowed the gap between thought and action and forced all humanity into immediate and intense social involvements."

Mr. McLuhan's remarks frisked over duplicating machines whereby "any reader can become a publisher," the computer with its "instantaneous retrieval system" and space capsules in which "the astronaut takes the planet with him in order to exist at all."

He likened the condition of the author in the electronic age to the astronaut in the space capsule.

Astonished Murmurs

Mr. McLuhan observed: "We the environment itself is aware about to see an age where ranged as a teaching machine. The author is going to be engaged in programing the teaching machine."

There were some, astonished murmurs as Mr. McLuhan developed this thought. Ivan Boldizar, president of the Hungarian P.E.N. Center, said that he was "knocked out" by listening to Mr. McLuhan, just as he had been 30 years ago by the reading of Spengler's "The Decline of the West." He added, "I no longer feel knocked out by Spengler."

Mr. Boldizar implied that after a while he would no longer feel knocked out by Mr. McLuhan's thoughts. The discussion circled around, but after a time it came back to Mr. Boldizar, who said that Mr. McLuhan had

Mr. Boldizar predicted that there would arise "a new type of writer, a craftsman in many fields, a renaissance type of writer. But such writers can emerge only if writers resist the ideas of Mr. McLuhan, an obsessed man who is one of the nicest men I know."

Disclaims Fatalism

Kathleen C. Nott, an English writer, said she too was haunted with a sense of doom in Mr. McLuhan's remarks. She said she was not sure whether the gathering was being told that there is not much future for writers or that "we must learn to love and live with the computer."

As the attack mounted on Mr. McLuhan, the author disclaimed any element of fatalism in his remarks. "To ignore the new devices is to put yourself in their fatalistic grip," he said. "Artists should go to the control tower not the ivory tower."

Lucian R. Fuller, the American engineer and author, supported Mr. McLuhan's thesis of the wide effects of new technology. "The dinosaur became extinct," he said, "because he carried everything with him—he had a one-ton tail to knock down a banana." Mr. Fuller added that each man in the United States now has in back of him about 30 tons of materials to extend his functions.

Unfortunately, he said, the new methods of communication are one-way and there is no way to answer back. "We must be coming to a point where we will develop some two-way communications," Mr. Fuller said.

Passive Resistance Favored

P. Tabori, the English writer, said that passive resistance was the course for the writer to follow when faced with the new machines. He spoke approvingly of a toy box that could be opened with pressure but all that happened when the lid was lifted was that a plastic hand came out and pulled the lid down again.

Haroldo de Campos, a poet from Brazil, said he agreed with Mr. McLuhan. He said that he and a group of friends had been writing concrete poetry since 1950. "The age of the literati is ended," he predicted.

Yves Gandon, a French novelist, said that after hearing Mr. McLuhan's remarks, "I was amazed, baffled and rather sickened." He hailed Mr. McLuhan as "a kind of mystic of the electrons," but indicated he was "scared" by the mysticism.

Books will not disappear, Mr. Gandon insisted. Television has not pushed out books in France, he said, noting that paperback sales there, as in the United States, had risen to great heights.

poet from the Virgin Islands, said he disagreed with the statement of the Brazilian poet that men of letters were obsolete because of the new media. "Our problem is to see how we can best use the technological development," he said.

Podhoretz Pokes Fun

Adolph Hoffmeister of Czechoslovakia conceded that people no longer dress for the opera but, instead, watch opera on television and said that the TV set had replaced the library in small apartments. But he insisted that even in a time of machines man has much need for art. Writers can still write, he said "about love, the desire for money and human weaknesses."

Richman Lattimore, an American writer, observed "that a great deal of what is broadcast is what has been created by the writer in solitude."

Norman Podhoretz, the American critic and editor, said that he had been having trouble trying to get his electronic earphones to work during translations and he jibed that "Mr. McLuhan couldn't get his to work either." He also poked fun at Mr. McLuhan's "highly seductive" ideas.

Mr. McLuhan called on Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet, to enter the discussions. In halting English Mr. Neruda said that "scientists have given us a Christmas Eve by opening the box of the universe." He said that there was a lack of union between science and literature.

Mr. Neruda said that he thought an airplane was beautiful when he first saw one in the sky when he was 10 years old, but that he had come to fear planes when he saw them drop bombs on Madrid. He added that he missed in the present time the feeling of warning against the dangers of mechanization that appeared in 19th-century humanist writing.

Common men everywhere fear the destruction that can come from the advances of science, he said. Mr. Neruda urged writers to concern themselves with "how we can eliminate fear of this wonderful world that the scientifics are

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